

Analyzing and Interpreting Literature

Description of the Examination

The Subject Examination in Analyzing and Interpreting Literature covers material usually taught in a general two-semester undergraduate course in literature. Although the exam does not require familiarity with specific works, it does assume that the student has read widely and perceptively in poetry, drama, fiction, and nonfiction. The questions are based on passages supplied in the test. These passages have been selected so that no previous experience with them is required to answer the questions. The passages are taken primarily from American and British literature.

The exam includes approximately 90 multiple-choice questions to be answered in two separately timed 45-minute sections.

There is also an optional essay section that can be taken in addition to the multiple-choice exam. The essay section is graded by the institution that requests it. Contact the school where you would like to receive credit for your CLEP exam to see if it requires the optional essay section for this exam.

Knowledge and Skills Required

Questions on the Analyzing and Interpreting Literature exam require candidates to demonstrate the following abilities.

- Ability to read prose, poetry, and drama with understanding
- Ability to analyze the elements of a literary passage and to respond to nuances of meaning, tone, imagery, and style
- Ability to interpret metaphors, to recognize rhetorical and stylistic devices, to perceive relationships between parts and wholes, and to grasp a speaker's or author's attitudes
- Knowledge of the means by which literary effects are achieved
- Familiarity with the basic terminology used to discuss literary texts

The exam emphasizes comprehension, interpretation, and analysis of literary works. Only a minimum of specific factual knowledge is required; however, a broad knowledge of literature gained through reading widely is assumed, as is a familiarity with basic literary terminology. The following outline indicates the relative emphasis given to the various types of literature and the periods from which the passages are taken.

Approximate Percent of Examination

35-45%	Poetry
35-45%	Prose (fiction and nonfiction)
15-25%	Drama

50-65%	British literature
30-45%	American literature
5-15%	Works in translation

3-7%	Classical and pre-Renaissance
20-30%	Renaissance and 17th century
35-45%	18th and 19th centuries
25-35%	20th century

Study Resources

The most relevant preparation for the Analyzing and Interpreting Literature exam is attentive and reflective reading of the various literary genres of poetry, drama, and prose. There are several ways to prepare for the exam:

1. Read a variety of poetry, drama, fiction, and nonfiction.
2. Read critical analyses of various literary works.
3. Write your own analysis and interpretation of the works you read.
4. Discuss with others the meaning of the literature you read.

Textbooks used in college courses in analysis and interpretation of literature contain a sampling of literary works in a variety of genres. They also contain material that can help you to comprehend the sense and intent of literary works and to recognize the devices used by writers to convey that sense and intent. To prepare for the exam, you should study the contents of at least one college textbook, which you can find in most college bookstores. You would do well to consult two or three texts because they do vary somewhat in content, approach, and emphasis. For example, Perrine's book is a basic introduction to reading literature; Edgar Roberts emphasizes literary analysis; books by Sylvan Barnet and Perrine include glossaries of literary terms.